

The Kentucky Leadership Academy:

Training School Administrators to be Instructional Leaders



Partnership for Kentucky Schools

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INTRODUCTION

The Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990 (KERA) holds schools accountable for continuous improvement and delegates substantial authority and budgets to the schools, including responsibility for curriculum and funds for professional development. These significant changes in Kentucky's education system implied a radically different role for school and central office administrators—a shift from managing and monitoring to leading and supporting instructional improvement. Yet administrators have had few opportunities to acquire the knowledge and skills their new roles demand. The Kentucky Leadership Academy (KLA) was the first statewide effort designed specifically to help administrators help schools improve.

Unlike most professional development for administrators, KLA focuses on leadership for curriculum, instruction, and teacher learning. This emphasis derives from its roots in KERA's provisions for intervening in schools with declining scores on the state test. A corps of Distinguished Educators (DEs) developed a process known as School Transformation and Renewal (STAR), in which they worked with schools to strengthen their educational programs and increase assessment scores (David, Kannapel, & McDiarmid, forthcoming; Davis, McDonald, & Lyons, 1997). When schools receiving DE assistance demonstrated success in increasing scores, school administrators around the state began to request training in the STAR strategies. The Kentucky Leadership Academy (KLA) was created in 1996 in response to these requests. KLA combined training sessions for district teams with support from regional coaches over a two-year period.

Given the small pool of DEs (now termed Highly Skilled Educators or HSEs), the hundreds of schools in need of assistance, and the demonstrated strengths of the DE model, equipping administrators with the skills of

DEs/HSEs could greatly extend the benefits of this approach. At the same time, KLA offers the opportunity to redefine the leadership roles expected of principals and central office staff to guide and support changes in teaching and learning.

STUDY DESIGN

The KLA study was conducted by the Partnership for Kentucky Schools with funding from the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the Pew Charitable Trusts. The study was guided by two major research questions:

1. What were the goals and structure of the KLA training program?
2. What impact did KLA have on participants?

To understand the nature of the training participants received and their reactions to it, we selected five of the nine regional KLA training cadres (described below) as the focus of the study, looking for both geographic representation and regions of the state that overlapped with previous professional development studies conducted by the Partnership for Kentucky Schools. The cadres selected varied considerably: one from an urban area with a long history of education reform, another representing a south-central Kentucky region where many districts had participated in national education reform programs, two cadres (at either end of the state) where the level of knowledge and skills varied dramatically from district to district, to an eastern Kentucky cadre in which most districts had few resources and scant histories of reform. To understand the impact of KLA on participants, we asked KLA developers to identify one district in each of the five cadres where participants seemed to be making particularly good use of what they learned in KLA. We studied best cases in order to understand both what good uses look like and the

conditions that support such use. From 1997 through 1999 we observed training sessions in four of the five selected regional cadres, as well as summer retreats in 1998 and 1999 that included all nine cadres. Participants in the selected districts, as well as cadre coaches, were interviewed at least twice during the study. KLA trainers in four of the five cadres were also interviewed. In one cadre, one member of the research team was a participant-observer attending all training sessions. We also visited six schools in four of the target districts in the fall of 1999 to interview administrators and teachers shortly after the administrators completed the two-year KLA training program. In total, we interviewed one state-level KLA design team member, four KLA trainers, five coaches, one superintendent, four district administrators, eight principals, one counselor, and 19 teachers.

FINDINGS

The findings presented below look first at our two main research questions: goals and structure of KLA training, and its impact on participants. We then consider the impact of KLA on student achievement, as well as efforts of participants to continue developing their leadership skills after KLA.

KLA Training Program

Goals and structure. The first two-year round of KLA training, the focus of our study, began in May 1997; a second round commenced in June 1999. The primary goal of KLA was to prepare administrators to build school capacity to improve student learning through a focus on curriculum and instruction. The initial prospectus for the program explained:

[KLA's] purpose is to assist all schools whose goal is high levels of achievement for all learners. It seeks to achieve this goal by

providing key components of the Distinguished Educator/STAR training program to educational leaders who have major responsibility in instructional leadership (Kentucky Department of Education, 1997).

The Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) invited all public school districts in the state to send teams to one of nine regional KLA cadres. Of Kentucky's 176 school districts, 99 sent teams to the initial training cycle for a total of 331 participants. Teacher training institutions and professional development cooperatives were also invited to participate in the program, and all cadres had a few participants representing these institutions. The membership of the district teams ranged from a minimum of two administrators representing the central office and principals to the more typical four to six participants. One cadre consisted of selected principals, central office administrators, and instructional support staff from a single large, urban district.

Each regional cadre was led by a coach and several trainers, normally drawn from the ranks of DEs/HSEs. Some of these trainers were associated with KDE Regional Service Centers (branches of the KDE). KLA participants received training in their respective cadres for 1 1/2 days four times during the school year. Each summer, all the cadres met together in week-long "retreats," for a total of three summer retreats for first-round KLA participants (1997, 1998, 1999). Altogether, participants received about 11 days of training during each year. In addition, cadre coaches visited each participating district about three times a year, assisting team members with problems or tasks they identified through leadership development plans.

Like the DE/HSE program, KLA training focused on four areas and outcomes:

- Planning for continuous school improve-

ment through implementation of the school transformation process (now expanded and renamed the consolidated planning process);

- Effective instructional practices and curriculum development (based on national and state standards and the content to be assessed);
- Accountability and assessment: designing an assessment process, embedded in the curriculum, with student progress as the goal;
- Facilitating change: demonstrating transformational leadership and support skills.

The key question in each focus area was, “Does this develop our capacity to improve student achievement?” Particular attention was given to analyzing student work (Kentucky Department of Education, 1997). Unlike the STAR program, which was imposed on schools and brought with it extra funding and assistance, KLA was voluntary and the cost (about \$1000 per participant) was borne by districts.

The KLA curriculum was developed by a design team that included KDE staff, DEs/HSEs, and Regional Service Center staff. Participants representing each cadre were added to the design team during the second year. The design team met prior to cadre meetings and summer retreats to plan the curriculum and hold “dress rehearsals” for KLA trainers. After the dress rehearsals, each cadre’s coach and trainers met to adjust the curriculum to serve the needs of that cadre. In addition, the design team met each year in August to plan the curriculum for the year and again in March to plan the summer retreat.

Training strategies. Much of the KLA training was based on the School Transformation and Renewal (STAR) planning and technical

assistance program used by the DEs/HSEs (Kentucky Department of Education, 1994), but it also included some additional resources. Initially, there was a common “script” that was followed in all the cadres. Over time, trainers and coaches continued to present common content, but they also felt increasingly freer to respond directly to needs expressed by cadre participants. KLA training was geared, as much as possible, to the school calendar. This allowed participants to study what they were currently required to do; for example, analyzing test scores when they were released and working on the consolidated planning process at the time of year when schools were developing the plans.

In cadre meetings participants worked as a whole group, in job-alike groups, or in district teams, depending on the activity. During the second year of KLA, all participants in each cadre were organized into study groups around specific topics that interested them, such as “monitoring consolidated plans,” “building leadership capacity,” “curriculum alignment,” or “designing work for students.” Time was provided during cadre meetings for the groups to meet, and many chose to meet or communicate electronically between cadre meetings. Study groups reported at cadre meetings.

Instructional strategies varied over time and among cadres. The four cadre meetings observed in December 1997 were largely traditional “sit and git” professional development with a common script: strategies for improving scores on the state assessment (then known as the Kentucky Informational Results Information System, or KIRIS). For instance, participants in more than one cadre learned a strategy for calculating the number of students who must achieve a higher performance standard for the school to meet its target score and were given tips on identifying students most likely to achieve that gain.

By June 1998 some trainers had already begun to deviate fairly substantially from the “script” in response to specific needs expressed by the participants in their cadre, while others were still hewing pretty closely to it. By that time there was already a concerted effort to put less emphasis on short-term strategies for improving test results and more on long-term capacity-building in districts and schools. The trend for training to adapt to each cadre’s needs accelerated, introducing more variation across the cadres. There were, however, some common techniques and concepts that were explored in all the cadres: analysis of student work, leadership techniques encouraging thoughtful reflection and leadership development among the faculty, and networking among cadre members.

By the second year of training, participants focused more on the work produced by students. For example, trainers asked participants to bring examples of student work, such as writing portfolio pieces, to cadre meetings. Participants analyzed these pieces with the help of trainers and state writing consultants. Another technique heavily emphasized in all cadres during the second year of instruction was the Pittsburgh WalkThrough (University of Pittsburgh, 1997), which provides a structure for classroom visitors to talk with students about their work, as well as to observe (see Appendix A).

Role of KLA coaches. Coaches’ assistance to districts varied depending on the needs identified by district participants. Participants in the districts we visited reported that coaches often helped them organize to develop and implement consolidated plans. For example, one participant (a district professional development coordinator) reported that the coach visited the district regularly, advising participants on developing realistic goals for their individual improvement plans and staying abreast of changes in these plans. During the first year, he helped the district form a consol-

idated planning committee and assisted with their development of a mission statement. In some cases districts asked coaches for intensive technical assistance, such as helping a district leadership group set expectations for district-wide use of the Pittsburgh WalkThrough or providing ongoing professional development as part of the district team. In other cases coaches provided information to individuals who raised specific issues or concerns.

IMPACT OF KLA ON PARTICIPANTS

KLA participants reported that the first year of training was a bit rough as the trainers struggled to follow the STAR model while also meeting different needs within the cadres. Some participants felt that the early months of KLA training were not useful. Others, particularly from relatively low capacity districts, liked the “nitty gritty” strategies for improving KIRIS scores. Some participants interviewed early in the training questioned whether participation in KLA was an effective use of their limited time, and noted that the training tried to cover too much without providing adequate time for in-depth discussions, reflection, and practice. A central office staff member in a district that had already instituted many reforms explained at the end of the first year of training:

There were times last year when we felt we didn’t have enough time to give KLA and do our regular jobs. We questioned whether we should continue. We sat with the superintendent and talked with him about the dilemma. He wanted us to continue, so we did, and I’m glad we are. They’ve worked hard at helping us meet our needs. They’ve listened to us.

The views of this participant were similar to many others, who reported that KLA training improved immeasurably in the second year as

a result of the trainers' willingness to adapt the training to the needs of each cadre. One central office administrator moved from skepticism at the end of the first year of training to aggressive fund raising at the conclusion of the training to make sure all district administrators could participate. Participants frequently recommended that all principals and administrators have access to KLA training, and one added that principals should be required to have it. A high school principal indicated that KLA was the best professional development he had in his eight years as principal.

In discussing the impact of KLA, participants as well as teachers in their districts and schools mentioned the positive effects KLA had on networking and access to information, and on leadership skills in the areas of curriculum and instruction. We consider these effects below.

Networking and information. Participants said they highly valued the networking that resulted from KLA. One central office participant commented:

One of the long term things that will have an effect was the networking with colleagues. If you have a concern or issue, you have people you can call for advice: what do you think and how can we help bring about changes? We became a family basically; we still communicate with a lot of people we were in KLA with, and if one has a problem, we generally know about it. We were a really close cadre, basically due to the coaches.... We were able to talk without hesitation, express our views and it was okay if we didn't agree all the time. It was fun, because you got to know people, they became friends and family.

A principal in another cadre said she had made good friends through KLA and appreciated being able to call any district to seek advice. She had established a particularly close bond

with administrators in a similar district whose superintendent had asked his principals to network with the principals in her district. A principal in that district had visited her school several times, and she had visited his. In addition to networking across districts, a KLA design team leader reported that participating in KLA as a district team made for closer working relationships within districts (Nawanna Privett, personal communication, 3/31/00). Several participants made similar comments. A central office administrator described the way KLA changed administrators' conceptions of leadership in his district and how this change affected district operations:

There's a real focus on improving instruction. We actually function as a team; we don't have just the principal or just the superintendent deciding about professional development, but we decide that from a group perspective. As curriculum supervisor, you don't determine everything, you get input from all the stakeholders. That's a significant paradigm shift for us.

Participants also reported that KLA provided access to up-to-date information, both on resources for assistance and the latest directives from the KDE. One participant commented:

Because it's a cutting edge program, we want to be current with all the good things happening to help provide the schools tools to examine what they're doing and work toward improvement. We're not in line for a DE and thought this was the next best thing to get that information to our schools-- just assisting the schools in looking at what they do and seeing if they can do it better. I do a lot of professional development for our district, and I want my skills to be sharpened as well as the principals.'

Impact on instructional leadership: Reports from participants. Nearly all central office

staff and principals interviewed reported that KLA training had made them more effective leaders, by both changing their conception of what leadership should be and giving them additional leadership tools. Although specific changes in administrators' practice varied depending on local capacity and prior reform experience, most of the interviewed participants said KLA had helped them focus their work and that of their schools on curricular and instructional strategies to improve student achievement, with an emphasis on alignment with state and national standards as well as Kentucky's high-stakes assessment.

One principal noted that he had used a process learned at KLA to help the faculty develop a school vision. He also learned how to use test and survey data to plan professional development and "how to lead and implement change." An administrator in a central Kentucky district, when asked what changes had occurred in the district as a result of KLA participation, mentioned running meetings in new ways by asking better questions to uncover sources of problems and adding time at the end for participants to reflect on the meeting. He felt that both of the district principals who participated in KLA were strong leaders initially, but had learned a style of helping that led faculty to develop their own vision. One of these principals commented that she thinks about her job differently as a result of her participation in KLA:

When I go in a classroom, I need to know what [the teacher's] focus is that day. The reading instruction should be age appropriate, developmentally appropriate; there should be opportunities for the kids to listen and to respond, so there is some way she is getting feedback, I hope orally. I want to see continuation of the lesson to include a real life experience and something that is hands on and incorporates other disciplines.

Another KLA participant interviewed in the initial stages of training described how he intended to implement some relatively top-down changes in response to KLA training:

Basically I'm going to change the lesson plans. I'm having them turn in lesson plans every two weeks (plans for the week before and the week after). With the Core Content aligned [Core Content for Assessment, Kentucky Department of Education, 1996], I'm going to interview three teachers, and it should be mapped out that they've hit the Core Content. KLA stresses parent involvement, and I'm going to work on that.

One principal reported that KLA's focus on aligning curriculum, instruction, and assessment had improved her instructional leadership skills and pointed to several actions she had taken. One was to focus faculty meetings on areas teachers identified for improvement. After the school's state test scores were unchanged for three years, she helped focus teachers' attention on Kentucky's learning goals and academic expectations and the *Core Content for Assessment* (Kentucky Department of Education, 1996), leading to improved scores over the past two years. She reported that teachers were talking much more about curriculum and instruction as a result of curriculum alignment meetings to discuss what they were teaching, identify gaps, and correct problems. Teachers had also developed exit criteria for students moving from primary to Grade 4 as well as exit criteria for each grade level. The principal focused on removing excuses from the teachers' discussion. She described plans to implement peer WalkThroughs in which teachers would visit one another's classrooms, then meet and discuss what they were doing and how to improve. Teachers in the building provided a similar account of the principal's leadership and school improvement activities.

In an urban district, an elementary principal and four teachers described how the school had changed as a result of the principal's participation in KLA. Teachers had been formed into vertical teams as well as horizontal (grade-level) teams. The vertical teams met monthly to work on curriculum mapping to make sure teachers were covering the essential content. Both the principal and the teachers said that one outcome of KLA was that the principal was in classrooms more, providing instructional leadership. Teachers reported that the principal knew what they were teaching and how they were teaching it, provided assistance and resources, and made sure they were doing their jobs. She also provided teachers with 55-minute planning periods so they could plan more effectively to meet student needs, and she found ways to release them from teaching so they could observe in other classrooms and obtain needed professional development.

In another district a central office team member spoke of the importance of KLA's emphasis on student work:

They put more emphasis on content, "working on the work," students' work, and concentration on ISLLC standards'. The biggest emphasis was put on student work. I think it was good, because education is the students and their progress and what's best for them. So to understand how to help students we have to look at what they're doing.

Participants talked a great deal about the usefulness of the Pittsburgh WalkThrough as a primary method of "working on the work." One principal commended the WalkThrough as a quick way to look for effective teaching and get students involved. He provided an example:

We were doing WalkThroughs to be sure that the children knew the expectations of

them—what was the focus of the lesson.

We asked the students why they were doing what they were doing, the purpose, and how do you know you are doing good work? The older children said the teacher had a rubric.

In another cadre a high school principal said that KLA had helped him become a better leader and helped him maintain a focus on instruction and student achievement. The faculty, he felt, now had high expectations of all students, and met each Thursday to look at test results and disaggregate the data to make sure they were addressing what needed to be done. He described using the KLA coach as a trainer through other contractual arrangements because she was considered part of their team. She assisted them in preparing for a Walk-Through with the entire faculty. This was the one district we visited where teachers rather than administrators conducted the Pittsburgh WalkThrough. High school teachers practiced at the middle school, learned what to look for, and conducted WalkThroughs in neighboring districts during two professional development days. The teachers said this experience gave them a better sense of what they needed to be doing in their classrooms, developed in them an appreciation for what was going on in a neighboring district, and helped them "see" what high expectations looked like in practice. The counselor in this same school reported that the principal's participation in KLA led to a stronger professional development focus on high expectations and on student achievement.

Perhaps the most dramatic action attributed to KLA was that of a principal who devoted a school year to the arduous process of trying to help teachers improve their practice and documenting whether they did so. Following district procedures, she documented that five teachers had failed to make sufficient improvement, then turned the documentation over to a district team who would work with the teachers for 60 days. If the teachers did not

improve during that time, they could be fired. Rather than take this risk, the five teachers resigned or transferred out of the school at year's end. The principal explained how KLA had been instrumental in this process:

Having five teachers leave last year is a result of KLA. There was a section in there about our moral responsibility to make sure our teachers are meeting their standards. I began to look really closely at ... teacher plan books, grade books, and classroom [practice]; and work[ed] with teachers trying to improve instruction.... Before, I would not have done that. One of those teachers had been here for four years, and I just ignored what was going on there.

Most participants did not mention areas of weakness in the KLA curriculum, but in one district that was already participating in a number of improvement programs, two administrators discussed a lack of depth in the approach to instructional leadership. An elementary principal in the district compared the Pittsburgh WalkThrough with professional development opportunities and activities associated with a national reform program, the National Alliance for Restructuring Education (NARE). At NARE, she said, you looked more closely at lesson plans and how to align the daily curriculum lesson plans with the *Core Content*, while KLA was more general. There was some work on curriculum at KLA, but she commented that the districts participating in the KLA cadre had such different needs that one size would not fit all. She commented: "The NARE work was more in depth, so maybe I didn't need the curriculum stuff KLA did." A middle school principal in the district compared KLA with another national reform program, the Appalachian Rural Systemic Initiative (ARSI), saying the two are similar but ARSI is more focused on instruction, specifically in science and math.

Overall, however, participants spoke very favorably of KLA by the end of the second year of training. One KLA coach summarized the impact of KLA on districts in her cadre:

Across the cadre, 80 percent of districts have summer retreats for school leaders and are using the KLA materials to focus on a move from management to instructional leadership. Three of the school districts have trained administrative staff in the Pittsburgh WalkThrough strategies. They are looking at performance issues, not just information sharing. I feel that, as a result of KLA, they now know what "good" looks like in leadership, curriculum, and quality student work. One school district created an Aspiring Administrators group, which provided 24 hours [of professional development] on leadership capacity; they worked with [a state university] to provide six hours of credit. This was a direct result of a coaching session using the ISLLC to help formulate the curriculum and develop the capacity for change in the district.

Impact on school practices: Reports from teachers. Teachers in the schools we visited were aware of changes for the better in school planning and professional development, and most were aware of specific changes over the past two years (when their administrators were receiving KLA training). For instance, a science teacher reported that the teachers were constantly aligning and re-aligning the curriculum. This year they were concentrating on aligning the curriculum from elementary through high school. She commented, "Now we are talking about showing what we have done to teach it. This way, if someone comes in to take over my class, if I'm moved to eighth grade, they will know what activities I've done." She noted that the central office hired consultants to come to the schools and help them identify their weaknesses and work to improve in those areas. "We meet the first Tuesday of every month. We decided in the

first meeting that we wanted help with writing open response questions, so at the next meeting, we'll have someone to do that." She said the middle school consultant would help her remediate her individual weaknesses (working on the writing portfolio, in her case) or arrange for professional development for a group, if a group need was identified. A language arts teacher at this school explained how the teachers identified reading as a weakness of their students, based on test data. This process led them to research various commercial programs aimed at improving students' reading skills, eventually selecting the one best suited to their needs and obtaining professional development on the program.

Consolidated planning was an ongoing process in most of the schools we visited, and most teachers could describe the process and its effect on their professional development, which was usually tied closely to analysis of test results. They generally received professional development in subject areas in which their students tested most poorly, sometimes in specific areas within those subjects that appeared not to have been taught well. One principal described this finer-grained way of identifying needs:

Our reading scores were generally high, but in the persuasive section on the reading part of the test, we were 6 percentage points below the state. Any time you go more than 5 percent [below the state average], you want to find out why and correct that in a hurry, which we will.

Although a number of administrators reported giving teachers major responsibilities for data analysis, planning, and mentoring, we encountered only one district (described previously) where teachers were given responsibility for a management tool: the Pittsburgh WalkThrough. In no other district did the teachers we interviewed appear to have a precise understanding of the WalkThrough and what it was supposed

to accomplish, or perceive it as a tool they could use for their own, independent professional development. In general, the main impacts of principals' KLA training on teachers were closer monitoring of their classroom performance and increased opportunities for teacher teamwork, mentoring, and reflection on their work.

Impact on Student Learning

We did not attempt to analyze test score data from the districts and schools participating in KLA. Three problems make inferences about test scores problematic: (1) A new state test (the Commonwealth Accountability Testing System, or CATS) was introduced halfway through the initial KLA training period, making test score comparisons impossible at this point; (2) Determining whether the unit of analysis should be districts or only those schools whose principals participated in KLA is difficult, since KLA works with both district-level and school-level administrators; and (3) Because the objective of KLA was to build long-term capacity in instructional leadership, test results will need to be analyzed over a period of years to determine whether districts are engaged in continuous improvement. Finally, if KLA participants do not behave differently as a result of their KLA experience, one would not expect to see changes in test scores. Hence we focused on documenting the ways in which participants changed what they do. Over time, it will make more sense to try to link participation in KLA to changes in school scores.

Continued Leadership Development After KLA

Because of the high degree of satisfaction with KLA and the need expressed by some participants to continue this type of training and networking, an alumni group – the Kentucky

Leadership Academy Alumni (KLAA) – was organized by KLA and the Kentucky Association of School Administrators (KASA). It was established to enable cadre members to stay in touch with one another and with the cutting edge information disseminated by KLA. KASA assumed responsibility for KLAA training. Some participants chose to repeat the full KLA training for a second period; some joined the alumni group, often making sure that other district administrators received the full training; some chose not to pay the fee for the alumni group (about \$500 per participant), even though they generally made sure other district administrators joined the second round of training. About one-third of the original participants enrolled in KLAA. Three teams were formed, representing western Kentucky, north central Kentucky, and eastern Kentucky, each with 40-45 participants (about the size of each KLA cadre). Three team leaders were selected from the ranks of the original KLA coaches. KLAA participants received all the information given to participants in the second round of KLAA training and also had team meetings twice a year (in October and March). In addition, they met for two days during the annual summer retreat with the full KLA membership.

Planning for KLAA was highly flexible, with each team essentially responsible for selecting its own curriculum. KLAA participants were required to choose the subject matter and format of their training and to share training responsibilities with the team leaders. This arrangement caused considerable anxiety at first but led eventually to very high evaluations of the training. One participant called it the best KLA training he had had. According to Tom Shearer, president of KASA (personal communication, 4/3/00), the pressure of being responsible for training their colleagues “pushed” participants to begin to practice what they were learning. Shearer believes this pressure has “forced the issue” of capacity building in districts that had not made progress previously.

CONCLUSIONS: POTENTIAL OF THE PROGRAM

Is the Kentucky Leadership Academy a successful intervention? Certainly, the participants we interviewed thought so. It should be kept in mind that, by design, we interviewed in districts the coaches recommended as making the best use of KLA training. Leaders of the KLAA alumni group reported that a fairly large number of KLAA participants appeared to have implemented only a limited amount of their initial KLA training and were therefore stimulated to continue the process through KLAA. Nevertheless, KLA training appeared to be well designed and responsive to the needs of a highly diverse group of participants.

The trainers and coaches appear to have been successful at tailoring the training to specific needs of the districts they served while at the same time focusing on a few key ideas and techniques. Many of the participants interviewed reported that KLA was the best professional development they had ever received. Virtually all reported that their leadership skills had improved as a result of KLA. In the schools we visited, principals had instituted new methods of consolidated planning and day-to-day teacher planning, which had some influence on what teachers were doing in the classrooms. These administrators paid close attention to the quality of teachers’ classroom instruction and professional development, which in some was well organized and effective even prior to KLA. They were taking seriously their responsibilities as instructional leaders, thinking about the research-based strategies advocated in KLA and beginning to make changes based on those strategies.

Apparently these efforts earned them recognition: We learned of administrators who dropped out of KLA for career advancement opportunities in other districts. In fact, in parts of western Kentucky, KLA was jokingly referred to as the “superintendent training” academy. All the districts we visited continued

their participation in KLA—an expensive program—during the second round of training through participation in the alumni group or through sending additional administrators for training, or both. This continued interest indicates that KLA fills an important gap in professional development to help administrators become effective instructional leaders.

There are many steps between KLA training for administrators and changes in teacher practice, and more steps still before improved student achievement could be expected. But KLA has begun to demonstrate to administrators that, in addition to ensuring a school's smooth running, they have the ability to affect the quality of classroom practice. A central office administrator told us that improving administrators' abilities to facilitate the work of teachers was the district's main reason for participating in KLA:

As an administrator, I've always looked at my function as providing support, and you provide support by sharing knowledge. KLA was an opportunity to gain knowledge that would empower teachers to implement the best practices. If you don't have an informed leader, able to provide support, then you won't have an effective instructional program.

The fact that both central office and school administrators participated in KLA appears to enhance the benefit that otherwise would have been an individual experience. Participants commented on closer working relationships within their districts as a result of KLA. To the extent that both principals and district staff develop new and shared conceptions of leadership for school improvement, KLA's impact is likely to be magnified.

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APPENDIX A

The WalkThrough—an idea arising independently in several school districts across the country and developed further by the Learning Research and Development Center of the University of Pittsburgh—is designed to accomplish the following:

- focus the school’s leadership and staff on the analysis of student work and what it reveals about the teaching and learning processes in the school;
- underscore a need on the part of the school’s leaders and others to learn more about instruction and learning, especially within the context of specific content areas;
- diagnose areas of success and areas in need of improvement;
- set the stage for developing a community of adult learners;
- yield details about teacher practice and student learning in the school;
- develop a shared language about instruction and learning (University of Pittsburgh, 1997).

The WalkThrough includes four questions to be asked of students that are based on the Principles of Learning in an Instruction and Learning Profile also developed at the University of Pittsburgh (1997): What are you learning? Why do you need to know this information? Is your work good? How do you know your work is good? The WalkThrough can be conducted in any of three modes: observational, collegial, or supervisory.

The WalkThrough also suggests questions for visitors; for example, on the principle of clear expectations, it asks:

What are the visible signs of expectations? In what ways do criteria charts, rubrics, or expectations require students to include facts as well as reasoning when producing the work?

Are good examples of quality student work that meets the standards on display? Are the qualities that make it good labeled?

Is student work displayed within a standards-based learning continuum and do students know how the skills and concepts they have learned or will be learning fit in the continuum? (University of Pittsburgh, 1997)

ENDNOTES

¹ISLLC is the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium, a program of the Association of Chief State School Officers which developed standards for school leaders.

